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ABSTRACT

The aim of the Rural Improvement Project of Maine from Spring, 1969-Fall, 1970 was to improve the quality of rural education through an innovative attempt to utilize specialized, trained personnel (Cooperating Rural Resource Teachers; associate teachers; teacher aides; 3 undergraduate teachers; and an elementary guidance counselor) and to restructure the learning sequence to help children reach their full potential. Individuals directly involved were trained to administer and interpret the Gesell Developmental Examination, which places a child in school by behavioral rather than physical or I.Q. age. The professional instructor was trained in: child psychology; curriculum development and curriculum trends; philosophy and techniques of organizing, conducting, and evaluating and ungraded multi-age unit; and working with teachers and teacher aides. The second phase of training was for the associate teacher and teacher aides. This 19 week undertaking consisted of 6 major thrusts, such as determining specific teaching duties and implementing developmental grouping. The project provided 5 objectives such as (1) a new pattern for staffing rural elementary schools and (2) a new design for teacher education. The final evaluation report outlined the general progress of the project and noteworthy achievements. (FF)

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Rural Improvement Project (RIP) [Summary and Final Evaluation Report]

College of Education - University of Maine, Orono

As is the case with numerous other areas in the nation, the quality of rural education in Maine can best be described in terms of its inadequacy. Scattered throughout the rugged terrain of the state are countless hamlets and villages that have never been able to financially support a program that, at best, could be considered mediocre. This pilot project was an experimental effort to improve the quality of rural education through an innovative attempt to utilize specialized, trained personnel and to restructure the learning sequence for children to assist them to move toward their full potential.

The aim of this project (RIP) was to make a forward thrust at the basic problems causing the deterioration of elementary education in rural Maine.

It attempted to provide:

1. a new pattern for staffing rural elementary schools;
2. redirection of staff responsibility and utilization;
3. a new design for teaching and learning in the rural elementary school;
4. utilization of specialized personnel who have recently completed training (Cooperating Rural Resource Teachers and Guidance Counselors);
5. a new design for teacher education.

The program utilized a specialized team consisting of:

1. Cooperating Rural Resource Teacher (CRRT) for two adjoining school districts;
2. one or more Associate Teachers (AT) for each new organizational pattern (cluster);

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3. one or more teacher aides (TA);

4. three undergraduate student interns (UI), each serving 16 weeks in each school; (Eight of these weeks consisted of preliminary professional experience including observation, and an additional eight weeks was spent in student teaching under the direction of the Cooperating Rural Resource Teacher and Professional Instructor. Professional course work and/or seminars was integrated with this intern experience.)

5. an elementary guidance counselor (GC) also served the program and system.

The Model

Two rural elementary schools, organized in three clusters each, were designated as pilot projects for this reorganizational experience.

Since the major objective of this project was the prevention of failure, plans were formulated to make this a realistically obtainable goal. One of the major thrusts of this program was that of preparing and utilizing qualified personnel. Good teaching, however, is not enough in that many youngsters still fail in spite of the efforts of excellent teachers. Although the reasons for failure are many and varied, one prime reason for school failure seems to be that many children are simply not ready for the experiences required of them in schools. Various forms of grouping have been tried in our schools; some of these have been effective, others have not. We utilized developmental placement as advocated by the Gesell Institute of Child Development. Research and actual practice efforts of the professionals at Gesell is a strong indication that failure can be prevented or, at the very least, minimized when children are placed in groups suited to their natural maturational and growth levels. In this approach the child proceeds at his own pace, and works at tasks appropriate to that pace. In addition, he benefits from the stimulation of others who are progressing as he is.

He thrives on an environment geared to him, and when a group is operating more as a unit, the individual's adjustment is more easily discerned. In a word, the thesis of the Gesell Institute on school readiness is that the time of starting and continuing in school should be determined by the child's behavioral age rather than age in years or I.Q. We attempted to implement this concept.

A program of developmental placement obviously requires that someone decide where a child really belongs in school. The Developmental Examination is one tool designed to assist in the making of the decision. Seen in this context, all individuals directly involved in this experimental project, and others who could implement similar projects in other rural disadvantaged areas were trained to administer and interpret the Gesell Developmental Examination.

To further enhance the developmental grouping concept, we organized these schools into three nongraded clusters.

The practice of assigning children to grades by chronological age is a convenient administrative device which is difficult to defend. In any group of children of the same age there are vast differences in every area which it is possible to measure. Expecting them all to progress uniformly has resulted in frustration and failure for many of the less able and in boredom, indifference and wasted talent for the faster learner.

The non-graded school is designed to facilitate the continuous progress of each pupil in harmony with his own growth pattern. Some pupils will require longer than others to reach certain developmental levels but there will be no stigma of failure.

An Example of the Cluster Concept

1. Cluster One -- all children who have reached a developmental age of 4, 5, 6, and 7 as measured by the Gesell Developmental Examination.

The staff consisted of:

a. an experienced Cooperating Rural Resource Teacher and an Elementary School counselor;

b. one Professional Instructor - an individual specially trained in developmental curriculum and other tasks appropriate to the new design;

c. one or two Associate Teachers (individuals previously in the system);

d. one or more Teacher Aides for each cluster;

e. one Undergraduate Intern for each cluster each semester.

2. Subsequent clusters were planned for all those who had developmental ages of 8, 9, and 10 and for those who had developmental ages of 11, 12, and 13. The plan was similar to Cluster One above. Such reorganization not only provided rural schools with vitally needed specialized personnel, it also represented an economic saving to a given district by utilizing fewer professional teachers, more teacher aides and undergraduates. In addition, pilot schools served as ideal practicum locales for future teachers.

The Training of the Professional Instructor

The preparation of the Professional Instructor was as follows: special work in group process; child psychology; developmental curriculum; current curricular trends; the philosophy and techniques of organizing, conducting, and evaluating an ungraded multi-age unit; procedures for working with student teachers and teacher aides. Each participant graduated at the conclusion of this project with a Master of Education Degree.

Training Phase

In the summer of 1970, the second phase of this project, the preparation of the Associate Teacher and the Teacher Aides was completed. This was a nine-week joint undertaking involving the local administrators, university personnel, and the Cooperating Rural Resource Teacher and Counselor. The major thrust of this phase was:

1. to assist the Associate Teacher and Teacher Aide to determine their respective roles in the master plan;

2. to assist enrollees to become thoroughly familiar with child behavior through a complete analysis of pupil personnel records;

3. to assist enrollees to implement developmental grouping;

4. to determine specific teaching and related duties;

5. to study existing curricular materials and develop new ones;

6. to pursue some aspect of study in greater depth as such study relates to environmental learning.

R. I. P.

C.R.R.T. = COOPERATING RURAL RESOURCE TEACHER
DUTIES: OVERALL DIRECTION OF CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION; SUPERVISION AND EVALUATION OF UNDERGRADUATE INTERNS; ON-THE-JOB INSTRUCTION OF COURSE OR SEMINAR FOR INTERNS AND ASSOCIATE TEACHERS.

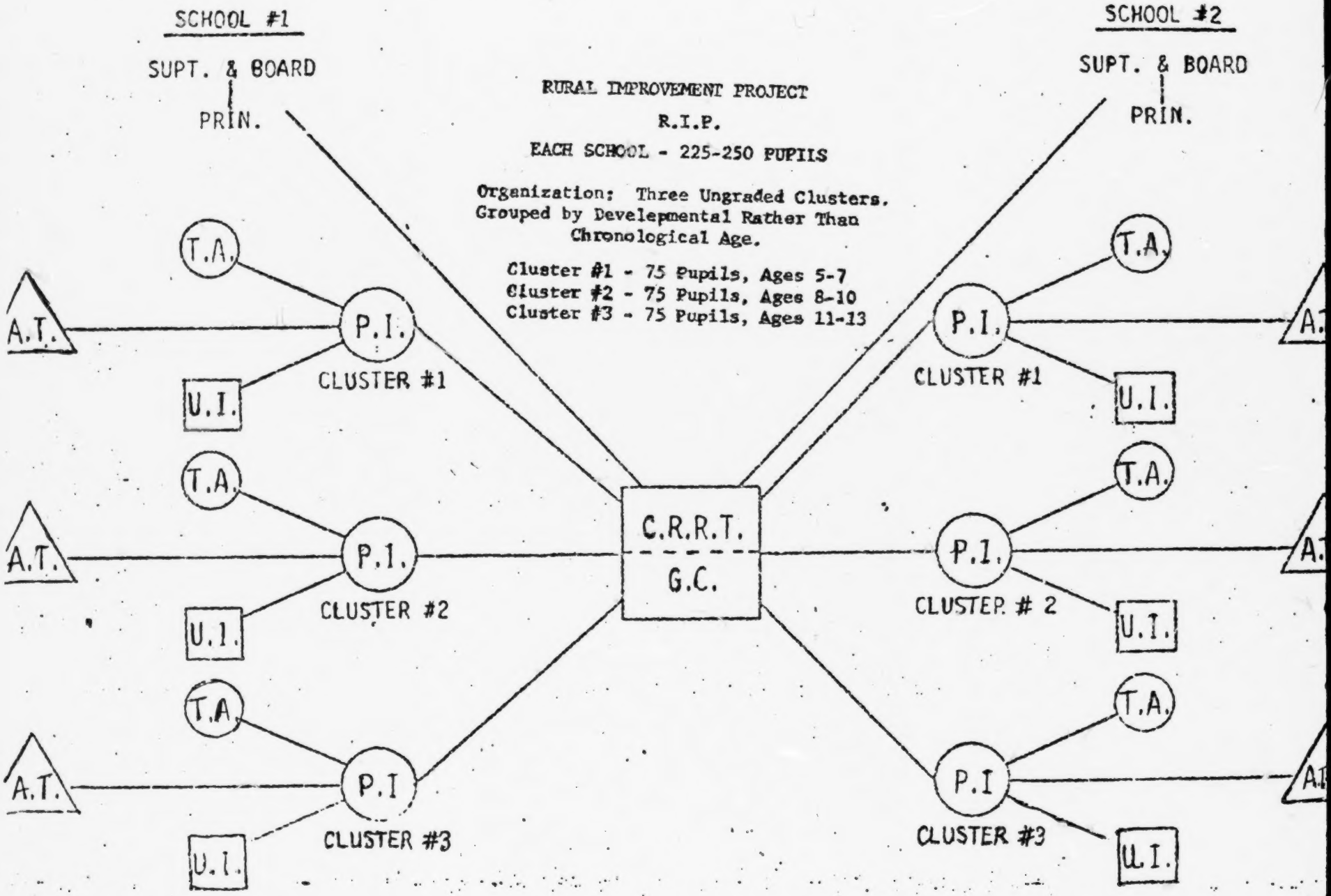
G.C. = GUIDANCE COUNSELOR
DUTIES: WORKS IN TESTING AND PLACEMENT OF CHILDREN IN CLUSTERS; COORDINATES PUPIL PERSONNEL SERVICES; MAKES REFERRALS; WORKS WITH PARENTS, TEACHERS AND STUDENTS.

P.I. = PROFESSIONAL INSTRUCTOR (M.Ed.)
DUTIES: RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE TOTAL INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM OF ONE CLUSTER; SUPERVISION AND INSTRUCTION OF ONE UNDERGRADUATE INTERN'S COOPERATION WITH C.R.R.T., G.C., AND OTHER P.I.'S IN COORDINATION OF ENTIRE SCHOOL PROGRAM.

A.T. = ASSOCIATE TEACHER
DUTIES: TEACH VARIOUS SIZED GROUPS; WORK WITH UNDERGRADUATE INTERN AND TEACHER AIDES; PARTICIPATE IN SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM.

U.I. = UNDERGRADUATE INTERN (16 WEEKS)
DUTIES: FIRST EIGHT WEEKS, OBSERVATION AND ORIENTATION TO TEACHING, (ALL CLUSTERS); SECOND EIGHT WEEKS, TEACHING ALL SUBJECTS.

T.A. = TEACHER AIDE
DUTIES: ROUTINE TASKS OF PUPIL ACCOUNTING; CLERICAL WORK; SUPERVISION OF PLAYGROUND AND LUNCH ROOM; PREPARATION OF VISUAL AIDS; ETC.


SCHOOL #1
SUPT. & BOARD
PRIN.
SCHOOL #2
SUPT. & BOARD
PRIN.
RURAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECT
R.I.P.
EACH SCHOOL - 225-250 PUPILS
Organization: Three Ungraded Clusters.
Grouped by Develepmental Rather Than
Chronological Age.
Cluster #1 - 75 Pupils, Ages 5-7
Cluster #2 - 75 Pupils, Ages 8-10
Cluster #3 - 75 Pupils, Ages 11-13
T.A.
A.T.
P.I.
U.I.
CLUSTER #1
C.R.R.T.
G.C.
CLUSTER #2
CLUSTER #3
CLUSTER # 2

R. I. P. -- TIME TABLE

COLLEGE STAFF PROVIDED SUPERVISORY, ADMINISTRATIVE AND CONSULTANT SERVICES FOR ALL PHASES OF THE ENTIRE PROJECT.

SPRING - 1969
- A. NEGOTIATION WITH SUPERINTENDENTS FOR TWO COOPERATING SCHOOLS.
- B. SELECTIONS OF SIX P. I.'S.
- C. SELECTION OF ONE C.R.R.T. AND ONE G.C. FOR THE MODEL SCHOOLS

JUNE - 1969
- A. COMPLETION OF MASTER'S DEGREE PROGRAM. C.R.R.T.
- B. COMPLETION OF MASTER'S DEGREE PROGRAM. G.C.

AUGUST - 1969
- A. CERTIFICATION FOR DEVELOPMENTAL TESTING OF ALL C.R.R.T.'S AND G.C.'S. (TWO WEEKS WORKSHOP CONDUCTED BY PERSONNEL OF THE GESELL INSTITUTE OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT)

ACADEMIC YEAR - 1969-70-
- A. COMPLETION OF TRAINING OF P.I.'S.
- B. YEAR OF PREPARATION - C.R.R.T. AND G.C.
  1. FINALIZE PLANS WITH SUPERINTENDENTS AND OTHER SCHOOL OFFICIALS.
  2. WORK WITH PARENTS.
  3. ADMINISTER DEVELOPMENTAL, ACHIEVEMENT, MENTAL ABILITY AND OTHER TESTS TO ALL CHILDREN.
  4. FORM TENTATIVE GROUPS FOR ALL CLUSTERS.
  5. COLLECT MATERIALS.
  6. WORK WITH STAFF OF EACH SCHOOL.

SUMMER - 1970
- A. PROGRAM OF PREPARATION FOR A.T.'S.
- B. PROGRAM OF PREPARATION FOR T.A.'S.

FALL - 1970 PROJECT IN OPERATION

PREPARATION OF PROPOSAL FOR EXTENSION OF PROJECT TO OTHER RURAL AREAS.

SELECTION OF OTHER C.R.R.T.'S AND G.C.'S.

RURAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECT
College of Education, University of Maine, Orono

FINAL EVALUATION REPORT
March 26, 1971

The evaluators have found, upon final review of the Project, that the means for evaluating the objectives as stated in the preliminary report and evaluation plan, have been faithfully carried out with but few exceptions. In making the final visit to the schools involved, certain results of the Project seem to stand out and the following statements are descriptive of this final review:

1. General progress of the Project following a two-year period of operation has been remarkable. Evidence points to the conclusion that the general objectives of the Project have been met. Although specific evidence is included as an appendix to this report, the evaluators especially call attention to the following:
   a. Utilization of specialized personnel is being achieved through the new staffing pattern, namely, the differentiated team. Through this pattern, staff responsibility has been redirected and a new design for teaching implemented. One of the observable outcomes of this is a relaxed interpersonal atmosphere with students and teachers interacting as equals in status. A significant drop in student anxiety (.001 level) as measured by the Castenada and McCandless Manifest Anxiety Scale for Children, is further evidence supporting this observation. (Bradley)
   b. Restructuring of the learning sequence has increased the individualization of instruction as well as enhanced student-initiated group work.
   c. The utilization of University Interns along with integration of course work, clinical experience and seminars has provided a new model for teacher education by moving the supervision and teaching of student

teachers to where the action is, this also occurring in a setting where they can experience maximum input from a broader faculty team.

d. Through developmental placement and individualization of task and pace, the possibility of pupil failure has been minimized. This has been accomplished by relating readiness to behavioral age rather than the traditional placement of pupils by chornological age or I.Q.

2. Several achievements of this Project are noteworthy because of national implications. Some of these are as follows:

a. The Project has resulted in an operative, viable, and visible model which can lead to fruitful duplication in other rural areas, not only in Maine, but also in other sections of the country.

b. The existence of a bank of trained cooperative rural resource teachers (CRRT) and counselors makes possible the immediate implementation of comparable projects in other school districts.

c. The Project has demonstrated the viability of innovative efforts in rural districts through cooperative efforts by institutions of higher education and federal and state agencies.

d. The Project has facilitated the participation of college professors in the resolution of everyday problem situations with real school settings. This leads to greater development of professional competence in the professor by getting him where the action is and also tuning him in more closely to the real world of the student teachers with whom he works.

e. The Project has demonstrated the usefulness of significant inputs of University expertise as well as support through material resources placed at the disposal of local school units. Again, student interns are given opportunity to utilize media and other resources where the action is.

f. A further benefit of the Project has occurred by making explicit a new career progression in the teacher role from teacher aide to undergraduate intern, to associate teacher, to professional instructor, to cooperating rural resource teacher. In this system there exists a reward hierarchy in which the master teacher can utilize her true proficiency--teaching.

In conclusion, the evaluators find that this project has been a worthy one, that the general objectives have been met, and that it has resulted in a model worthy of emulation by other school districts in similar rural settings.

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